Making the grade

A SELF-WORTH PERSPECTIVE ON MOTIVATION AND SCHOOL REFORM

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The future and its discontents

We know nothing about motivation. All we can do is write books about it.
PETER DRUCKER

Certainly much has been written about motivation. To this extent Drucker's observation is correct. The *Reader's Guide Index* lists scores of books on motivation written in the last decade alone, and these do not include the hundreds of research articles and technical reports churned out each year. What is less clear, however – and this is Drucker's concern – is the *nature* of our understanding. Actually, we do know a good deal about motivation, but on closer inspection our knowledge is quite uneven. We know *how* to arouse people to greater effort, especially for short periods of time: how, for example, to arrange incentives for factory workers so that production improves and absenteeism falls; and even how to rearrange the social organization of schools so that students are more willing to pursue learning for its own sake. But knowing *how* to motivate is not the same as knowing *what* is motivation. Here Drucker makes his point. Whatever is being aroused by the clever use of rewards and incentives, namely, motivation itself, remains mysterious and elusive. Motivation, like the concept of gravity, is easier to describe (in terms of its outward, observable effects) than it is to define. Of course, this has not stopped researchers from trying. The history of various attempts to grasp the essence of motivation is the first main theme of this book.

We will find that some observers believe motivation resides in human emotions. To them, positive motivation is synonymous with the feelings of pride and exhilaration that accompany success; and the darker side of motivation – despair, anger and resistance – is thought to be amplified by the feelings of shame and humiliation that accompany failure. There is much to recommend this position. Clearly, feelings can both arouse and inhibit action. Other investigators argue with equal conviction that motivation is fundamentally the property of thoughts, or cognitions, as we will call them – those faint musings, memories, and self-reflections that preoccupy humans much of the time. This basic proposition also is above debate. Clearly, thoughts also trigger, sustain, and inhibit action. Still other researchers look to physiological arousal – those momentary changes in body and brain functioning – as the telltale footprints of motivation. Here, too, the arguments are reasonable, even persuasive, but like the other positions they are also incomplete.

Finally, there is the contrarian point of view: Internal, subjective states like motivation or self-awareness are useless as scientific concepts, and are

merely excess baggage when it comes to explaining behavior. To these *behaviorists,* motivation is simply a way of talking, metaphorically, about the effects of rewards and punishments that cause people to act with more or less energy or to pay more attention to some aspects of their environment than others. According to this argument, if researchers could describe reinforcement schedules in enough detail, then they would have access to all the information necessary to make accurate predictions about human behavior without the need to invoke the concept of motivation. Consider, for instance, the fact that Duncan's weekly allowance depends on keeping up with his homework. A casual observer might pronounce Duncan keen on school, and motivated to a fault, although we know that a more accurate, revealing interpretation is that Duncan's behavior is under the control of positive reinforcers.

A second theme of this book involves picking through this definitional maze and the various controversies created by these different perspectives. We will sift and weigh the evidence and eventually conclude that each position shares some portion of the truth. But how should these seemingly disparate claims and approaches to motivation be integrated into a larger, meaningful whole? Our rallying point is a self-worth perspective, and the arena of inquiry the schools and classrooms of America in the last decade of the 20th century. In the course of these inquiries we will encounter most of the major players, events, and lines of investigation that make up the history of research on achievement motivation over the last half century. The accumulated work of hundreds of scholars is reviewed here and woven (hopefully) as individual threads into a larger tapestry of understanding.

First of all, then, this book is meant to serve as an introduction to the topic of achievement motivation. But there is more. I will also deal with the future, and the possibility of reshaping American education to meet the challenges of the future. Clearly, these two topics – motivation and the future – are closely linked. As Harry Lauder once remarked, "The future is not a gift, it is an achievement," and it might be added, an achievement built in equal measure on discipline, realism, and joyful dreaming. I will arrange the research on achievement motivation in ways that lead to several recommendations for restructuring the educational experience of millions of schoolchildren today and many millions more tomorrow. This gathering together of current scientific knowledge, then refracting it through the lens of practical concern is the third main theme.

In effect, this book is intended to function variously as a treatise on achievement motivation, as a bridge between educational theory and practice, and as a blueprint for responsible change. In this first chapter we will see how the concept of achievement motivation and the demands of the future are inseparable aspects of any informed effort to recast the mission of schools. We will also unveil the broad outlines of what it means to undertake a motivational analysis of classroom life, and introduce the general psychological arguments to be pursued. I begin with a brief exposition of the future and of the desperate need for education to face constructively the challenges that a changing future will certainly bring.

Prospects for building the future

My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.
CHARLES KETTERING

If the future is an achievement, as Lauder argues, then teachers are futurists along with politicians, filmmakers, and journalists – those individuals who according to J. McClellan (1978) "make other people's futures more real to them." Indeed, at its best, education should provide students with a sense of empowerment that makes the future "real" by moving beyond merely offering children plausible alternatives to indicating how their preferred dreams can actually be attained. By this reckoning teaching can be thought of as the ultimate, if only the second oldest, service profession.

But of what should this future-building legacy consist, especially since no one can know the future, at least in any detail? First, we can suggest that in preparing for the future, students develop viable occupational skills. Learning a discipline – whether it means becoming a plumber, a rodeo performer, or a writer – and doing it well provides the foundation for a sense of purpose, security, and confidence in adulthood. It is confidence that propels the future and, conversely, feelings of incompetency that cause us to fall short of what is best in us. This is true of individuals and also of societies and civilizing epochs. Perhaps Lord Kenneth Clark (1969) put it best when he remarked that

> civilisation requires a modicum of material prosperity – enough to provide a little leisure. But, far more, it requires confidence – confidence in the society in which one lives, belief in its philosophy, belief in its laws, and confidence in one's own mental powers. . . . Vigor, energy, vitality: All the great civilisations . . . have had the weight of energy behind them. (p. 4)

Second, students should prepare for change. Change, to recall a cliché, is the future's only constant. There is a need to accept with grace the inevitability of change – to be part of the process of change whether this means facing up to evershifting personal relationships, accepting change in the prevailing social order, or understanding changing global economics. As we shall see, change is best handled, and even welcomed, when individuals possess a well-developed arsenal of mental skills associated with original, creative, and independent thinking. This suggests that schoolchildren should cultivate the capacity to deal thoughtfully with future circumstances that they and even we, their mentors, cannot fully imagine. This capacity involves a continual readiness to find problems everywhere, to be puzzled by the obvious, to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, and a willingness to think about the seemingly impossible. Naturally, of course, change should not be accepted uncritically. It must first be evaluated in the light of both potential benefits and inevitable costs, an observation that calls to mind the *cliff-hanger theorem:* "Each problem solved introduces a new unsolved problem" (O'Brien in Dickson, 1978). Avoiding the pitfalls of expediency requires careful problem analysis, critical thinking, and the ability to anticipate the results of change.

Third, and perhaps above all, the greatest legacy of education is to encourage a will to learn and to continue learning as personal circumstances change – in short, to promote a capacity for resiliency and self-renewal. This point was anticipated over a half century ago when John Dewey (1938/1963) remarked that "the most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning" (p. 48).

These are brave sentiments and some would say hopelessly romantic and unattainable: a sense of commitment, self-confidence, and resiliency in the face of change. No one can be against these values, yet who among us is immodest enough to say precisely how to achieve them? As a result, these values are honored more in the breach than in the observance. Today too many students graduate or drop out of school without a single achievement for which they can feel uniquely responsible or justly proud. Moreover, the majority of our students understand neither the history of change nor the forces that shape their own individual lives; and their loyalties often run to self-indulgence and near-term gratification.

Also, there is little that is new about these values. There have been repeated calls for encouraging them, with a long history of failure to do so dating back at least as far as Greco-Roman times, when an anonymous observer lamented that "our students have grown lazy and are disrespectful of authority. They slight their tutors, mislead their teachers, and fail to attend to their lessons" (Covington & Beery, 1976, p. 1). These same troubling themes have echoed down through the ages and find their most recent embodiment in American ghetto youngsters who according to Shelby Steele (1989a), "see studying as a sucker's game and school itself as a waste of time. One sees in many of these children almost a determination not to learn, a suppression of the natural impulse to understand, that cannot be entirely explained by the determinism of poverty" (p. 506). The educational enterprise has been in deep trouble for a long time, and the problems continue to mount.

But now there is something *new,* not the values themselves but a fuller understanding of how to shape the educational experience of youngsters in order to encourage these values. Today we have a reasonably good grasp of why schools so often fail to achieve these broad humanizing goals, despite a consensus view among parents and teachers alike of their importance (Reasoner, 1973). We also understand, noble sentiments aside, why we often fall short of teaching even the barest essentials: reading with understanding, writing with clarity, and computing with accuracy.

The vision of the teacher as futurist prompts the one question central to all strategic institutional planning: "In the long run, in what business will this institution be?" (Keller, 1983). If this question is ignored, educators run the risk of being continually diverted by immediate crises and satisfied with stopgap measures. But how do we establish the necessary perspective? To begin we must take note of the reasoning of Isaac Asimov, when he proposes that "the important thing to forecast is not the automobile, but the parking problem; . . . not the television but the soap opera" (Dede, 1988, p. 15). And extending this reasoning to education – to estimate, for instance, not the number of microcomputers in classrooms by the year 2020, but how these devices

will alter the relationship between teacher and student, school and society. Similarly, by adopting a motivational perspective, we must ask, not so much what subject matter content will be most appropriate in the year 2020, but what kinds of reasons students will have for learning at all!

I concur with the wry observation that forecasting is very difficult, especially if it's about the future. This is the predicament faced by meteorologists. It is said that forecasting the intermediate future, say, weather patterns from 3 weeks to 6 months distant, is the riskiest. By comparison, there is more agreement about long-term global trends in the weather, years or even decades into the future, and about forecasting for today: Just stick your hand outside; if it's wet, it's raining!

In education, too, we know it's raining, not to say blustering. In fact, the storm warnings have been up for years, which prompted Louis Gerstner, President of American Express, to remark impatiently, "No more prizes for predicting rain. Prizes only for building arks." But what kinds of arks? And what is likely to happen if we do not go into the ark-building business? Before meddling with the future we must be convinced that alternative visions of education are likely to fare better than "business as usual" or, stated differently, that future prospects are so horrifying that virtually any change in the current ways of schooling will be welcome. Enough is now known for us to develop plausible scenarios of future events if trends continue. These trends project a dismal, downward course. If things are going to get worse, how bad are they now?

The class of 2001

The high school graduating class of the year 2001 just recently entered kindergarten. Like so many other students before them, they, too, approached the future with enthusiasm. Yet unless things change, their enthusiasm will also dwindle and soon evaporate. Kati Haycock and M. Susan Navarro (1988) describe it this way:

> For many, this process will begin very early in their school careers. Even in first grade, some youngsters will get the sense that something is wrong with them; that somehow they're just not doing things right. . . . By the sixth or seventh grade, many will not be proficient in the basic skills. . . . Though still in school, they will have dropped out mentally. Before high school graduation, they, and many of their peers, will drop out altogether." (p. 1)

In California, 3 out of 10 students entering the ninth grade today will not graduate from high school, a rate that has doubled since 1970 (Haycock & Navarro, 1988). Moreover, these figures are conservative when considering Latinos and blacks whose comparable dropout rates in California are now close to 50%!

For many of those who remain in school, the prospects for learning are shocking. For instance, the nationwide reading achievement scores for recent graduating high school seniors reflect a ninth-grade level of proficiency, which

likely explains a U.S. Navy report that one-quarter of its recent recruits could not read well enough to understand basic safety instructions (reported in Wurman, 1989, p. 54). Writing skills are no better. According to Albert Shanker (1988), President of the American Federation of Teachers, only 20% of those youngsters still in high school can write a minimally acceptable letter applying for a job in a local supermarket. Shanker also reports that only 5% of all 17-year-olds can read a railroad timetable or a bus schedule well enough to get to a given destination on a certain day. Additionally, 88% of graduating high school seniors cannot correctly place six common fractions in order from smallest to largest. It makes little difference that the 20-year decline in SAT scores has recently been reversed, at least temporarily (Haycock & Navarro, 1988). The absolute level of intellectual functioning – the yield factor, as it is called by the Educational Testing Service – is still abysmally low by any standard. A majority of junior-high school students can name more brands of whiskey than they can past presidents of the United States. And in a recent ABC-TV sponsored survey of 200 teenagers, two-thirds could not identify Chernobyl (one youngster guessed it was Cher's real name).

Current events may not be their strong suit, but American schoolchildren show even less aptitude for problem solving, if that seems possible. For example, one group of first- and second-grade children blithely solved the following word problem, mostly by manipulating the integers 10 and 26: "There are 26 sheep and 10 goats on a ship. How old is the captain?" (Reusser, 1987). None of these students saw anything odd about this question. Unfortunately, immaturity is not the explanation. A group of 100 fourth- and fifth-grade students attacked a similar nonproblem with equal diligence, unperturbed (with the exception of only one child) by the fact that as presented the task could not be solved: "Yesterday 33 boats sailed into port and 54 boats left it. Yesterday at noon there were 40 boats still in port. How many boats were still in port yesterday evening?" Only after considerable prompting did five of the students describe the problem as "strange" or "different." These are examples of students calculating but not thinking, trapped by the mindless rote application of rules that unfold automatically, irrespective of their relevance to the problem. And, what is worse by far is that our children are unaware of these deficiencies or at least seem unperturbed by them. They know less about mathematics, less about their world, yet ironically they feel better about themselves than do students in China and Japan (Stevenson & Flanagan, 1990). Mary McCaslin and Thomas Good (1990) ruefully observe that "our students are like Buick, who advertises that its car is fifth-rated but is still the best in America" (p. 9).

The typical school environment for the class of 2001 is hardly conducive to academic learning of any kind. Many schools are literally armed camps. Nationwide, 135,000 children take a gun to school each day (Haycock, 1990) and thousands more must report to probation officers for past offenses. In Los Angeles County alone at least 600 rival gangs have been identified with a total of some 70,000 members (State Task Force on Gangs and Drugs, 1989). Gang-involved youth play a disproportionate role in acts of violence including rape, robbery, extortion, and vandalism, and in many cities they represent a

serious threat to teachers and other students. Perhaps most distressing of all is the increased involvement of gangs as a primary network for drug trafficking. The money-making potential of drug dealing has turned many gangs into organized crime units. In some cities eight-year-olds are being used as drug runners for dealers, as weapons carriers, and when they have grown a little older they may become gang enforcers and hit men. Schools are rapidly becoming the main center of drug distribution in America.

Today in the 1990s bombing, arson, extortion, and injurious assault have replaced running in the halls, chewing gum, and getting out of line as the leading school discipline problems. In some ghetto schools, the rate of student deaths caused by peer violence and drug overdose approaches the rate of American combat fatalities in the Viet Nam War. Things have become so desperate in some urban areas that black teenage males have literally become an endangered group. And speaking of violence, consider suicide. Estimates of unsuccessful suicide attempts among our youth run as high as 600,000 per year nationwide with 6,000 actual deaths reported in 1986 (President's Newsletter, 1986).

Overall, this dismal scene can be put in stark relief by a single statistic: Thirteen million students – or nearly one-half of all school age youngsters – are at serious risk for failing academically (''Bringing Children Out,'' 1988). Also, more often than not, school failure clusters with delinquency, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy. A recent study sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation (Dryfoos, 1990) estimates that at least three million adolescents, ages 10–17, have fallen prey to all or most of these high-risk behaviors, and that another four million are at substantial risk of destroying their life chances. These seven million youngsters represent one out of every four adolescents in the United States. Moreover, by this same accounting, an additional seven million adolescents are at ''moderate'' risk, ''moderate'' being defined as precocious, but at least protected, sexual activity, and by only *occasional* drug use! These statistics make grim reading. But what is even worse is the enormous future downstream costs they represent – more housing subsidies and health care, more police and prisons, and more welfare for adults who cannot qualify for jobs that would otherwise enable them to support themselves and their families.

These social costs are also reflected in disquieting statistics. Consider, as only one example, school dropouts and the burden to be borne by a poorly educated underclass. In California, girls who leave school – pregnant or not, married or unmarried – are nine times more likely to go on welfare than those who graduate from high school (Haycock & Navarro, 1988). Nationwide, the estimates are comparable (*Carnegie Quarterly,* 1988). For boys who drop out, the unemployment rate 2 years later is three times higher than that experienced by high school graduates. Moreover dropouts are four times more likely to commit a crime within 2 years of leaving school compared to their counterparts who graduate. The annual cost of housing a prison inmate in 1984 was $15,000 per year, roughly the annual undergraduate tuition fee and living expenses for Harvard, Yale, or Stanford at that time (Haycock & Navarro, 1988).

Finally, consider the dislocation and waste of talent created by underachievement in school. In the technologically sophisticated society of the late 20th century, the need for unskilled labor has plummeted, and is likely to continue downward at least in the near-term. Over the next two decades, the majority of new job openings will require some form of education beyond high school. Yet, at present less than 40% of our youth enter any form of postsecondary education, including technical trade schools, and far fewer than half of these individuals complete their course of study. Among those blacks and Hispanics admitted to college, the rate of degree completion is under 20%.

This educational shortfall is largely responsible for the present employment problems of teenagers. For example, although the number of job openings in the period 1986–1988 was relatively plentiful, the unemployment rate among youth seeking work was five times higher than that found among adults. Many undereducated youngsters simply could not qualify for the available jobs. Nor is there much relief in sight. The national job market is characterized by rapid shifts in opportunities across economic sectors and by a diversity of employer needs. Automation, international competition, and seasonal fluctuations add to this instability.

Change is the watchword. For instance, when the graduating class of the year 2001 enters the permanent work force, it is estimated that they will change careers – not just jobs, but careers – an average of five times before they retire. Yet given what can be deduced from all of the statistics just cited, a near majority of our youth will face an unknown world utterly unprepared – compromised by neglect, bewilderment, and anger. Without the capacity to participate and learn from change, and from occasional upheaval, these youngsters will become crippled, confused, and then overwhelmed by a vastly changed future society in which they will no longer know how to participate. Such observations take on a special imperative in light of America's shrinking role as the economic engine and prime mover of the world economy. Clearly, we cannot hope to compete in a technologically advanced world game when many of our players are illiterate or underprepared. For example, one Tokyo firm uses high school graduates from Japanese schools to conduct statistical quality control on its semiconductor products. In the United States, the same firm had to hire individuals with graduate school degrees to carry out the same work because neither American high school nor college graduates could be taught the technology involved (reported in Wurman, 1989, p. 151).

Clearly much is amiss. For many children growing up in America has become a perilous, dispirited business. And unless things change, the overwhelming likelihood is that the situation will worsen. Before we rethink the mission of education, however, several additional observations are in order.

Issues of responsibility

The first observation concerns the matter of assigning blame. Who is responsible for the mess? The present crisis in learning cannot be attributed solely,

or even largely, to the failure of any particular educational policy. Many other factors outside the reach of schools are also involved in this decline – poverty, the loosening of public morals, broken homes, and the drug epidemic, to name only a few. In fact, it can be argued that without the steadying presence of schools, for all their limitations, things would be even worse.

Be that as it may, finger pointing is of little value because in this maelstrom of abuse, abandonment, and failure, what is *cause* and what is *effect* become blurred. Take just one example. There can be no doubt that the failure of schools to teach contributes directly to youngsters dropping out of school; but then so does becoming pregnant. Teenage pregnancy is a leading cause of leaving school in America. Nationwide, more than one million girls in the class of 1986 became pregnant before high school graduation (Riessman, 1988). This translates into a teenage pregnancy rate twice that found in Great Britain and Canada, three times that of France, and more than four times the rates in Sweden and Holland ("Bringing Children Out," 1988). Although these rates are somewhat higher for black than white teenagers, the birthrate for whites alone still exceeds that for teenagers in all other western industrialized countries. It is these babies born to mere children, raised in unrelenting poverty and frequently abused, neglected, and drug exposed, who will in turn become handicapped in *their* social, cognitive, and emotional development, so that yet another generation becomes failure prone (Patterson, 1987; Schorr, 1988). And the deprivation can be elemental. Some children enter kindergarten never having held a pencil, others never having used silverware!

Here one can glimpse something of the multiheaded, interlocking nature of the problems that beset the efforts of teachers to teach, and of students to learn. Little wonder that teachers are so prone to disillusionment and burnout. Events simply overwhelm them. As one veteran teacher remarked, "When you've given your all and there is no hope – that's too much." There are fewer villains than victims in this scenario.

Not only are the causes of school failure many, but the burden imposed on schools grows daily. Increasingly schools are expected to act as custodians for a growing assortment of youthful misfits and incorrigibles. Schools also are expected to stem the tide of rising teenage promiscuity through instruction in a secular version of morality training, and to act as the first line of defense against public health dangers of truly catastrophic proportions, including epidemic drug use.

It would be foolish to argue that issues of drugs, sex, and violence are not part of growing up educated in America today. Nor can schools easily abandon their responsibilities in these areas. But their resources are limited. To these burdens we can add other responsibilities that in part represent failures of wider social policy, and public indifference. These additional demands involve the legitimate need for everyone to succeed – ethnic minorities, the economically disadvantaged, learning-handicapped pupils, and the burgeoning populations of immigrants from non-English-speaking homes. The enormity of this challenge is reflected by the fact that at last count some 91 non-English languages and dialects are spoken in the Los Angeles County

schools! And then there is the pressing need to teach children how to cooperate with peoples of diverse political, cultural, and religious backgrounds in the face of a potentially hostile world whose boundaries shrink daily.

In the waning years of the 20th century, there is altogether too much evidence that American schools have become a dumping ground for the unwanted, the unacceptable, and for the seemingly unsolvable problem; a place of failed individuals and of failed social policy. It is an enterprise for which too much has been demanded, with too few resources made available. As a consequence, schools do too few things well, and when they do achieve excellence, too few students benefit. This situation has occurred, despite the Herculean efforts of dedicated, hardworking teachers, administrators and staff. If energy and devotion alone could solve our educational problems, then solutions would be far more advanced than is now the case. We will argue that teachers can do little to shorten the terrible odds arrayed against them and their students unless there is a fundamental reconsideration of the motivational dynamics of learning, and of *what* should be taught as well as *how*. Actually, teachers are victims, too, ensnared by the same outmoded views of motivation and learning that hold students hostage.

Issues and answers

A second observation concerns the matter of solutions. If many of the causes of academic failure lie outside the reach of schools to correct, then solutions become just that much more difficult. More than schools must change. Everywhere today we find evidence of a struggle among scholars, policymakers, and public officials to draw together into a more meaningful, coherent whole a kaleidoscope of isolated facts, tantalizing but untried theories, and commonsense answers, which in the words of Ernest Becker (1981) are "strewn all over the place, spoken in 1,000 competitive voices . . . insignificant fragments magnified out of all proportion while major insights lie around begging for attention. There is no throbbing vital center." Becker is correct. Intertwined problems are divided up into more manageable but essentially meaningless pieces that correspond to traditional academic, political, and bureaucratic boundaries. Drug abuse remains the province of rehabilitation programs, and poverty the responsibility of welfare programs. This is a piecemeal approach to a problem that deserves a unified response. If we are ever to find adequate answers these artificial distinctions must be abandoned. For example, an analysis of health-care delivery by David Hamburg (1986), President of the Carnegie Corporation, suggests that sustained health benefits are most likely to occur when the target group, say, school-aged children in a single community, are immersed in a circle of positive, interlocking influences in the form of parental health education programs, community clinics, service organizations, and church-based outreach groups. Likewise, studies of effective schools reveal that only the total school environment can have a positive impact on student achievement. No single element – such as intensive parental involvement or reduced class size – is enough in itself to make the difference, but none can be ignored. Effective schooling involves a shared

sense of commitment by students, staff, parents, and community alike (Levin, 1986; Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Bossert, 1979).

Within the last decade a series of blue-ribbon committees has attempted to rally the kinds of consensus of which Becker speaks, beginning in 1983 with the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk,* which warned ominously of a "rising tide of mediocrity" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and most recently, the State of California Task Force on Self-esteem and Social Responsibility, which urges the incorporation of self-worth goals into the educational mission (Covington, 1989; Mecca, Smelser, & Vasconcellos, 1989). Yet, despite this national focus on reform, things remain largely fragmented, if we can judge from a recent poll of some 150 policymakers asked to predict those trends and issues that will mark education in the 1990s ("A Look Ahead," 1990). A number of these individuals mentioned *accountability* as the most important theme and stressed the need for higher, uniform national standards of performance for both teachers and students. Many others focused on the question of who should control school policy, with the local community, the several states, and the individual classroom teacher being nominated about equally. Still other respondents emphasized the need for more teachers – two million new teachers will be needed by 1995, but less than one million young people are expected to enter the profession before then. Incidently, only a handful of the 150 respondents pointed to the need for curriculum reform, and fewer still raised questions about the present quality of student motivation.

It is not that any one of these issues is right and the others wrong. Nor is it necessarily a question of their relative importance. Rather one wonders where Becker's "throbbing vital center" is to be found. Our particular search for this elusive center starts with a motivational analysis of the single most important, irreducible component in the equation of schooling – the individual learner.

Now, a few words about the kinds and scope of remedies to be offered in this book. First, my recommendations will focus on those that follow uniquely from a motivational perspective. In effect, I will ask if there is any special contribution that research on achievement motivation can make to our understanding of the exceedingly complex phenomena of school learning and school failure.

Second, these recommendations are intended to be compatible, insofar as possible, with other analyses of the school crisis that come from quite different starting points: from the business community, from minority neighborhoods, and from Main Street.

Third, recommendations will be restricted to those that are eminently practical and capable of implementation by schools within a relatively short period of time, say, within 5 years. This implies that these recommendations are not particularly new, but largely untried, yet familiar enough to be implemented without a massive overhaul of the system. Indeed, all the ingredients are well known to educators, but they are often overlooked and underappreciated – until now "strewn all over the place."

Fourth, there must be a reasonable prospect that these changes, if initiated